DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 382 SP 031 805

AUTHOR Bowen, Dorothy N.; Bowen, Earle A., Jr.
TITLE Contextualization of Teaching Methodology in Theological Education in Africa.
PUB DATE Jun 88
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Accrediting Council for Theological Education Conference of Theological Educators (Limuru, Kenya, June 16-19, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Style; Comparative Analysis; *Field Dependence Independence; Foreign Countries; Individual Characteristics; *Learning Strategies; Non Western Civilization; *Teaching Methods; *Theological Education
IDENTIFIERS *Africa

ABSTRACT

Differences between the learning styles of Western and African students are highlighted in this discussion of theological education in African schools. Since many of the teachers in theological institutions are either westerners, or have been educated in the West, Western learning style is the one most rewarded in the classroom, and those students who do best in the schools are those who have a Western learning style. The traditional American learning style is field independent while the African student has a field dependent learning style. Eighteen teaching strategies, specifically designed to address the field dependent learning style are described, with the suggestion that these strategies will be most successful in theological instruction in African countries. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED315382

SP

Contextualization of Teaching Methodology in Theological Education in Africa

by

Dorothy N. Bowen
&
Earle A. Bowen, Jr.

A paper presented at the
Acrediting Council for Theological Education Conference of Theological Educators

Limuru, KENYA
16-19 June, 1988

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. N. Bowen

E. A. Bowen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SP 031 805

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF TEACHING METHODOLOY IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Earle & Dorothy Bowen

We take our mandate for this paper from the International Council of Accrediting Agencies' MANIFESTO ON THE RENEWAL OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION, with particular reference to section No. 1 on Contextualization and section No. 9 on Instructional Variety. We quote...

> 1. Contextualization..."Indeed not only in what is taught, but also in structure and operation our theological programs must demonstrate that they exist in and for their own specific context, in governance and administration, in staffing and finance, in teaching styles and class assignments, in library resources and student services."
>
> 9. "Instructional variety. Our programs of theological education must vigorously pursue the use of a variety of educational teaching methodologies evaluated and promoted in terms of their demonstrated effectiveness, especially with respect to the particular cultural context. It is not right to become fixed in one method merely because it is traditional, or familar, or even [sic] advantgarde. Lecturing is by no means the only appropriate teaching method, and frequently by no means the best. Presumably neither is programmed instruction. Our programs need to take practical steps to introduce and train their staff in new methods of instruction, in a spirit of innovative flexibility and experimentation, always governed by the standards of effectiveness."

From time to time, new terms come to be popular in the field of education. Missionaries home on furlough who are blessed with the opportunity to take courses to upgrade their

education often find that whole new vocabularies seem to be in fashion in the classroom and the literature. One term that is found in the literature today, even in "popular" magazines is "Learning Style". What is meant by this term? Learning Style has been defined as individual variation in models of perceiving, remembering, and thinking, or as distinctive ways of apprehending, storing, transforming and utilizing; a potent variable in student's academic development through their school career; in how students learn and teachers teach; in how students and teachers interact in the classroom. In other words, ones learning style is the way she or he takes in information in a meaningful way to her or him.

There are various learning styles which have been identified, but the two about which the most research has been done are "Field Dependent" and "Field Independent." A field dependent person is one who approaches situations in a global way, seeing the whole instead of the parts. This person is likely to rely on external referents as guides in information processing and is likely to have a social orientation. The field independent person is one who consistently approaches a wide variery of tasks and situations in an analytical way, separating elements from background. This person tends to give greater credit to internal referents and tends to have a nonsocial orientation. At this point, it must be emphasized that learning style has no relationship to ones intelligence or ability. This cannot

be over emphasized. Field dependence/independence is a continuum and the writers fall at opposite extremes of that continuum. However, we both began our Ph.D. programs on the same day, successfully defended our dissertations within a week of each other and received our hoods simultaneously.

As one might expect, most of the research in this area has been done in the West. A large data base exists, and it has been shown the Westerners tend to fall 50% field dependent and 50% field independent. However, various writers have pointed out that in the traditional American system of education, the field independent student has the advantage because the system has been geared more to that student's style. This is also the case with much of European education. Since many of the teachers in the two thirds world theological institutions are either Westerners, or have been educated in the West, it stands to reason that the Western learning style is the one being rewarded in these classrooms and only those who have that style of learning or those who learn to cope with that style are those who are being rewarded.

Dr. Joseph Hill, researcher in learning styles wrote, "We believe that 90% of the students with normal ability can learn 90% of the material 90% of the time if teaching methods and media are adjusted to the student's educational cognitive (learning) style." Table I is a compilation of the preferences of the field dependent student contrasted with those of the field independent student.

The questions remain, what about the African student? Where does she/he fall on the field dependent/independent continuum and which are her/his preferences when it comes to teaching methodology?

Perhaps the following quotation will give us a partial answer. Bishop Tutu, when speaking at the Fifteenth World Methodist Conference in Nairobi in July of 1986 made the following statement:

> It is an important digression to note the differences in the African perception and that of the westerner. As we indicated, the westerner is largely analytical, whereas the African tends to be synthetical. The one - the westerner - breaks things up and the other tends to see things as wholes. That is why westerners can be such very good scientists, but they are not so good at putting things back together, and will often put asunder what God had intended to be joined together. The African may be good at seeing the wood but most often will miss the significance of the individual trees. The westerner will tend to be cerebral whereas the African gives great play to feelings. The former, particularly in his worship, may be cold and intellectual, while the latter might be emotional and warm, sticking loosely to intellectual content. The westerner emphasizes the individual person, whereas the African will give an important place to the community. The one encourages initiative - the western view - and is concerned about individual liberties, whereas the latter tends to stifle personal initiative for fear of being out of step with the herd. The westerner will usually be lonely in a crowd, whereas the African comes into his own as a communal being and would understand what King David meant when he spoke about the "bundle of life."

If we accept this as an accurate description of major characteristics of the Western person and the African person, we can then set up some hypotheses for research purposes.

We conducted research in both West and East Africa to identify the predominant African learning style and then to

propose those teaching strategies which are most appropriate in higher education on the continent.

Using two research instruments we tested a total of 205 subjects in four theological colleges and three government secondary schools. All were post secondary and pre-degree students. Subjects came from:

1. 31 - United Missionary Theological College, Ilorin, Nigeria.
2. 36 - ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja, Nigeria.
3. 29 - Moffat College of Bible, Kijabe, Kenya.
4. 22 - Kenya Highlands Bible College, Kericho, Kenya.
5. 23 - St. Anthony's Secondary School, Ilorin, Nigeria.
6. 36 - Kijabe High School, Kijabe, Kenya.
7. 28 - Kericho High School, Kericho, Kenya.

The results showed that 91% of all students in the study were field dependent, while 9% were field independent. One hundred percent of the West Africans were field dependent, while 84% of the East Africans were field dependent. There was no significant difference between theological students and government secondary school students. Of the 118 theological students, 97% were field dependent while 83% of the 87 government school students were field dependent.

The results of the second instrument showed the students to have a visual orientation rather than an auditory one. The students prefer structure and guidance from the teacher. They learn from group discussion and small group interaction.

They dislike a predominance of the lecture method and learn through the use of visual materials, hands on experiences and printed outlines.

This leads us to propose the following teaching strategies:

1. A course outline is essential. Field dependent persons must be able to see the planning for the whole course at one time because their thought processes are global.
2. Along with the written outline, an oral preview of the entire course needs to be given. What the student will be expected to learn, and why, will help the student learn. Clearly stated course objectives will greatly aid the learner.
3. A preview of the material to be learned in each individual lesson should be given. At the beginning of the lesson the teacher can give a brief statement of what will be covered in that class period. A written set of objectives for every chapter or daily lesson would be even better, since African students are more visual than auditory. Some daily overview is needed.
4. Because the field dependent student is not analytical, the teacher needs to identify the important points in a lesson. The field dependent student needs to be specifically trained to do this.
5. The field dependent student needs frequent feedback and reinforcement. This is not a need for the field independent learners, but is very important for the field dependent

student.

6. Small units of work are to be preferred over larger ones because the field dependent student finds the small modules easier to handle. This can be dealt with at the course planning level.

7. Field dependent students are much more sensitive to the praise or criticism of others, both peers and authority figures, than are field independent students. Correction and support must be given with that in mind, especially if the instructor is field independent and thus may put less importance in a correction than the field dependent student who is receiving it.

8. The African student will work best in a group. Group projects, group discussion, and working in pairs is suggested. The student does not do the best work possible when the work must be done on an individual basis. Students should, in fact, be encouraged to work together, to study together, and to do class assignments together. Tests, however, can still be conducted individually.

9. The field dependent student prefers structure and direction in doing a project. Witkin, Moore, Goodenough and Cox (1977) stated that "there are probably many classroom situations where, because the material to be learned is not clearly organized, the field dependent student may be at a disadvantage"(p.25).

10. Since Africans are more visual than auditory, they function best with a textbook or duplicated notes. Dictating

notes is very unsatisfactory, and if neither a textbook nor duplicated notes is available, notes should be written on the board.

11. Visual aids of all kinds are essential. Pictures, charts, posters and models, among others, not only are important to raise the level of learning, but may in fact be necessary for the most basic learning to take place at all levels.

12. The field dependent student is reinforced by external rather than internal motivators. Praise, criticism and grades all have more effect on the field dependent student than on the field independent student. For this reason, more frequent grades may improve learning more for the predominately field dependent African student than for field independent students.

13. The African student needs to see models and examples. She/he will learn more from following the teacher's example than from listening to the teacher's explanation of how to behave.

14. The field independent student would prefer to do things in his/her own way. The field dependent student would prefer to be told how to do a thing and then do it in the way he/she has been told. To have a teacher say "do it any way you wish" is very frustrating to a field dependent student.

15. The total lecture method is the weakest teaching method to use with the African student. If the nature of the material to be taught demands some lecture, it needs to be

supplemented with handouts, pictures, many examples, and illustrations.

16. The African student will learn best the material which is socially oriented. Therefore, relating the material to people or situations will aid the student in learning it.

17. Criterion-referenced grading should be used. This means that the grading is based on the student's own performance in relation to previously set standards rather than in competition with others. Whereas the field independent student benefits from competition, the field dependent student seldom does.

18. While field dependence/field independence is considered stable after about age 17 and usually does not change in adults, coping strategies for dealing with teaching methods other than those which cater to a given learning style can be learned. However, these strategies must be purposefully taught. They will not necessarily simply be assimilated by the student. Teachers (most especially teachers in theological education) must not assume that the student will learn simply because the material is presented, if it is presented in a way to which the student's learning style finds it difficult to respond. Our task in the teaching of the Christian workers of the church is too important simply to hope that we are using the right methods.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bowen, D. N. (1984). Cognitive Styles of African Theological Students and Implications of Those Styles for Bibliographic Instruction. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Florida State University.

Bowen, E. A. (1984). Cognitive Styles of African Students. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Florida State University.

Bowen, E. A. & Bowen, D.N. (1986). Theological Education and Learning Styles in Africa. Theological Education Today, 18 (1), 5-10.

Bowen, D. N. (1986). Bibliographic Instruction in an African Theological School. Africa Theological Journal, 15, 54-62.

Cross, K. P. (1976). Accent on Learning. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Even, M. J. (1971, January). Cognitive Style Theory in Practice. Life Long Learning, the Adult Years, pp. 14-17.

Fafunwa, A. B., ed. (1982). Education in Africa: A Comparative Survey. London: G. Allen & Unwin.

Hovey, R. L. (1971). Cognitive Styles in African Cultures: The Global Articulated Dimension. Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University. Dissertation Abstracts International, 32, 4836A.

Warren, J. R. (1974). Adapting Instruction to Styles of Learning. Findings. p. 1.

Witkin, H. A., Moore, C. A., Goodenough, D. D., and Cox, P. W. (1977). Field-Dependent and Field-Independent Cognitive Styles and Their Educational Implications. Review of Educational Research. 47. pp. 1-64.

Witkin, H. A., Moore, C. A., Oltman, P. K., Goodenough, D. R., Friedman, F., Owen, D. R., and Raskin, E. (1977). Role of the Field-Dependent and Field-Independent Cognitive Style in Academic Evolution: A Longitudinal Study. Journal of Educational Psychology. 69. pp. 197-211.

Drs. Earle and Dorothy Bowen are faculty members at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology. Earle's doctoral research was designed to determine the learning style of African students. Dorothy's was a parallel study in the area of bibliographic instruction.